

1 Introduction

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is the federal government's basic charter for protection and wise use of the environment. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) has the responsibility for implementing the NEPA process that enables federal decision makers to factor environmental values and consequences into decisions on major federal actions such as the adoption of official policy, formal plans, and programs, and for the approval of specific projects. The NEPA process provides a service to the decision maker by enabling an informed decision that considers environmental consequences along with other decision criteria (i.e., mission considerations, cost, schedule, etc.). The NEPA process also is a service to the public by enabling public input into potential federal decisions and by providing public disclosure of agency actions that affect the environment. The NEPA process therefore enables the agency to achieve the results, outcomes, and products that respond to the goals of the Act and the goals of the CEQ regulations: quality federal decisions that protect, restore, and enhance the quality of the human environment.

NEPA is implemented through procedural provisions that provide for the preparation of Environmental Impact Statements as a tool to inform decision makers and the public regarding the consequences of Federal actions. The EIS serves as an action-forcing device to ensure that the policies and goals defined in the National Environmental Policy Act are infused into the ongoing programs and actions of the Federal Government. The EIS provides a full and fair discussion of significant environmental impacts and informs decision makers and the public of the reasonable alternatives that may avoid or minimize adverse impacts or enhance the quality of the human environment.

The Department's Office of Science (SC) has used the EIS process to support program and project decision making. The EISs prepared under SC's purview have lead to Records of Decision (RODs) and have assisted decision makers with evaluating reasonable alternatives and making choices that best serve the needs of the human environment and the Department.

The NEPA process and the preparation of EISs are closely linked to the DOE federal piece of Integrated Safety Management (ISM). The EIS process assists

DOE in decisionmaking early in project and program planning, prior to the “go/no go” decision point. The five functions of ISM (define the scope of work, analyze the hazards, develop and implement controls, perform the work within controls, and provide feedback and improvement) are represented in the principal elements of an EIS. The proposed action and the alternatives considered in an EIS represent the formal definition of the scope of work. Analysis of hazards is accomplished through the evaluation of potential environmental impacts from the alternatives. The Record of Decision (ROD) defines the work to be accomplished and provides the basis for completing the proposed action. Feedback and continuous improvement are accomplished through identification of EIS lessons learned and the sharing of other valuable experiences as coordinated through the SC NCO. Feedback and improvement also occur through the use of a mitigation action plan (MAP), when appropriate. The MAP, a requirement under 10 CFR 1021.331, explains how the corresponding mitigation measures, designed to mitigate adverse environmental impacts associated the course of action directed by the ROD, will be planned and implemented. An annual MAP report is required that provides a status of the mitigation activities for each MAP. Thus, the EIS is a key environmental application of ISM.

To ensure that the use of EISs by SC continues to enable quality decisions, public disclosure, and environmental protection, quality assurance (QA) planning is essential. This QA Plan for the conduct and management of the EIS process will enable the process to be timely; documents will be of high quality with accurate information; and the review process will result in objectivity. It will provide for the continuation of the QA infrastructure within SC that supports the NEPA process (both at SC HQ and in the field), and it will enable quality decision making both within the NEPA process and with respect to the environment. The QA Plan will assist SC HQ in assuring that its EISs meet DOE’s expectations for quality, adequacy, completeness and legal sufficiency.